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THE GENIUS OF SHAKESPEARE

AND OTHER ESSAYS

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To
Salem Goldsworth Bland

Whose eager intellectuality, whose varied culture, whose
genuine disinterestedness, whose Christian
optimism, make him a constant re-
freshment to his friends, this
little book is, with affec-
tion, dedicated.

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The Genius of Shakespeare

The Genius of Shakespeare

SHAKESPEARE impresses us rather as a phenomenon than as a man. John Morley has used language of this kind in regard to Voltaire; but it seems to me far more eminently applicable to Shakespeare. The meaning is that when we come to appreciate such men, we shall think and speak of them as we ordinarily think and speak of great historical movements involving large masses of men. Unquestionably Shakespeare does produce this effect upon us. He is not merely first, with some other man like Spenser or Milton second; he is something apart, quite *sui generis*. This impression of the phenomenal is due to the supremacy in our literature of the age to which he has given his name; to his undoubted supremacy within that age; to the number of his works and the multi-

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tude of his characters; and to the very real paucity of the certainly known facts of his career. The modern tendency is, by excessively minute *personalia*, to emphasize a man's individuality. These are days when biography has run riot. No man of even third-rate prominence dies but the market groans under an excess of letters and reminiscences and gossip. The dead man's kitchen and bedroom and study, his niceness or his nastiness, his laziness or his industry, his loves or his liaisons or his hates, all are laid bare pitilessly and morbidly. No possibility under these circumstances of apotheosizing the man. His limits are strictly defined, his measure accurately taken. Needless to say, Shakespeare lived long before any such policy was in vogue; and the elemental, the phenomenal proportions of his reputation are in part due to this fact.

It is impossible to account for Shakespeare's accomplishment. We must simply bow in the face of the ultimate fact of genius.

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His antecedents do not account for him: from what we know, they were of the most ordinary. Neither does his education. In this respect he got, up to the age of about fourteen, just what the average grammar-school boy of his time got. What this was is known, because we have access to the curricula of the schools of the period. The Latin that he read, for example, was by no means prodigious in quantity. Whether he knew any Greek at all or not is a moot question, though some have thought so on the strength of the mellifluous names of his heroines. His knowledge of French is, I suppose, vouched for by the scenes in that idiom in "Henry V." His early withdrawal from school is supposed to have been due to his father's poverty.

His immediate environment, again, offers nothing in the way of explanation. Warwickshire and Stratford-on-Avon are characteristic and full of appeal, but by no means extraordinary. Nothing in or about those half-timbered houses, those

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narrow streets, that slumbrous river, those rich, maternal meadows, to account for the man of genius, Shakespeare. I have been in Stratford just once. Precisely the thing that impressed me there most deeply was the effort I had to make to realize that I was standing at the birth-place and death-place of the most remarkable man that the Teutonic section of the race has produced.

Some find the rationale that they seek in the greatness of the time. And it was a great time—perhaps the greatest in our national history. For one thing, a sovereign sat upon the throne who centred in herself the affections and the homage of Englishmen to an extent unequalled before or since. Elizabeth was the cynosure of all English eyes: we need go no farther than “*The Faerie Queene*” to learn that. Three of our queens have given name to their respective epochs, Elizabeth, Anne and Victoria. But the direct personal influence of the first, of course, quite eclipses that of the second, and even

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obscures that of the third. It is only by courtesy that the age just passed is styled the Victorian. But why should this worship of Elizabeth be considered an element of national greatness? Because it tended to unify the nation, and that at a time when it most needed unifying, that is to say, when it was rent by religious dissension. It was a great time, furthermore, because the English mind was just being enfranchised by the shift from Catholicism to Protestantism. The separation from Rome took place under Henry VIII. The Book of Common Prayer took the place of the Missal in the reign of Edward VI. But it was under Elizabeth that the English people became Protestant; that is, as we should say, was launched upon its modern career of mastery. The reign of Elizabeth, again, saw the beginning of England's supremacy on the seas. But, above all, it was then for the first time that England thrilled with the superb sense of nationality. A magnificent exuberance was in the air.

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And the nation, thus unified by attacks from abroad and by homage to the Queen, and thus glowing with exultation, found its natural expression in the drama. For it was not prose in any of its then forms of pamphlet or essay or romance or pastoral; not lyric poetry in any of its then forms of sonnet or ballad or song; but the drama that bodied forth and reflected the England of Elizabeth.

But, after all, the question still remains: How was it all localized in this particular Warwickshire boy? The drama was the most characteristic thing of the period. It is at least worth noting that the greatest practitioners of this drama were Shakespeare and Marlowe, the one the son of a glover, the other the son of a shoemaker. The case of Marlowe is in this sense the less remarkable, inasmuch as he became a university man, chief, in fact, of the circle of the University Wits who, in literary parlance, are treated as the immediate predecessors of Shakespeare and his group. All that is left to us to say in this regard

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is that perhaps the total absence of anything special in Shakespeare's antecedents, environment and equipment only served to fit him the better to be, first a recipient and with great swiftness an exponent, of the marvellous national and racial influences of his time.

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Shakespeare is so large and elemental that he awes us, and it is certainly within the mark to say that he is so impersonal that in the main he eludes us. This being so, we are bound to prize everything that gives us a grip on him, that brings him in the least close to us, that shows him to be of our own flesh and blood, that rids him of the Titan and makes him human. One thing that does this is the knowledge that his literary faculty developed in a quite natural way. Even Shakespeare had to serve his novitiate, short though it was; even he had to pass through a tentative time, a time of indecision; even he had to knock at more doors than one before he got the "Open, Sesame." Thus, in a per-

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fectly natural way, we find him catching the dramatic fever, as he goes up to London from his little provincial town with a company of strolling players. Then as a hanger-on about the theatre he serves in most subordinate capacities. Later he becomes himself a player, and next a retoucher of plays. One of the plays that he is thought to have worked over just a little is "Henry VI.," in whose three Parts his share is admitted to be small. For a moment he mistakes his vein and writes narrative. The "Venus and Adonis" and "The Rape of Lucrece," which date from 1593 and 1594, are at once gorgeous and luscious Renaissance poems, illustrating for one thing what I shall refer to later, namely, the admirable robustness and health of Shakespeare; but Wordsworth was surely right in saying that they prove that Shakespeare had no talent for simple forthright narration. With the tactful sense of genius he saw that he was on the wrong path, and left it never to return. Then electing the drama, he

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settled to it as his life-work and practised all its kinds.

Not only did his powers develop in a thoroughly natural way, but he was not at all above, as we say, allowing his experiences to color, if not determine, his work. About the turning of the century, for example, some tragic thing occurred in his own life, with respect to which the exact truth is not known, but which is supposed by many to be more or less explicitly set forth in his sonnets. Thereafter for some time his outlook upon life was sinister and pessimistic. It was during these years he wrote the darkest of his tragedies—“Hamlet” and “Macbeth,” “Lear” and “Othello.” But through this darkness he pulled into serenity, and the last years of his life were spent in his native town in calm and prosperity. Of this period nothing could be a better reflection than “The Tempest.” The whole play has a marked note of blandness and of finality. Just one other concrete example. The boy Shakespeare no doubt spent much of his

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time in the woods and fields about Stratford. Now, when he was about thirty-five—in other words, when he was just about passing into that period of maturity when the memories of his boyhood would cease to be vivid—he glanced back lovingly and set himself to preserve the recollections of his boyish days in the pastoral “As You Like It.” If Shakespeare had been city bred he never could have written this comedy. Its whole action passes in the open. It spurns the city and the court. It is full of abandon. It is redolent of the spirit of the greenwood. The “Robin Hood Ballads” themselves do not out-do it in this regard.

It is a commonplace to say that Shakespeare is the most impersonal of poets. This is but another way of saying that above any other man that ever lived he possessed the dramatic faculty of subordinating his own personality to the personality of his imagined characters. Browning, it occurs to me, is about the

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only Englishman who can be named in anything like the same breath with him in this respect. Nor does it do any discredit to Shakespeare to mention Browning in this connection, since Browning's magnificently healthy and catholic genius was surcharged with the dramatic instinct. To realize just how impersonal Shakespeare was, all one needs to know is that although he placed to his credit, roughly speaking, forty plays, it is impossible to say with certainty from internal evidence whether he was a Catholic or a Protestant; and that despite the fact that the religious question was precisely the burning question of his day. When Elizabeth came to the throne three-quarters of her people were Catholic; when she died three-quarters of them were Protestant. This means an immense shift, and that in less than half a century. Shakespeare lived and wrote in the midst of this revolution, yet without showing his hand definitely. This matter of Shakespeare's impersonality has been finely phrased by Matthew

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Arnold in one of his sonnets, which I shall quote, with the exception of its last three lines:

"Others abide our question. Thou art free.
We ask and ask—thou smilest and art still,
Out-topping knowledge. For the loftiest hill,
Who to the stars uncrowns his majesty,
Planting his steadfast footsteps in the sea,
Making the heaven of heavens his dwelling-
place,
Spares but the cloudy border of his base
To the foiled searching of mortality;
And thou, who did'st the stars and sunbeams
know,
Self-schooled, self-scanned, self-honored, self-
secure,
Did'st tread on earth unguessed at."

The leading image of this sonnet seems to me at once accurate and majestic. I am glad to be able to put along with this poem of Matthew Arnold, as celebrating the same point, a sonnet by a Canadian poet, Frederick George Scott:

"Unseen in the great minster dome of time,
Whose shafts are centuries, its spangled roof
The vaulted universe, our master sits.

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And organ-voices like a far-off chime
Roll thro' the aisles of thought. The sunlight
flits

From arch to arch, and, as he sits aloof,
Kings, heroes, priests, in concourse vast,
sublime.

Glances of love and cries from battlefield,
His wizard power breathes on the living air.
Warm faces gleam and pass, child, woman,
man.

In the long multitude; but he, concealed,
Our bard eludes us, vainly each face we scan.
It is not he; his features are not there;
But, being thus hid, his greatness is
revealed."

And yet, sphinx-like as Shakespeare was,
he is supposed by many to have shown
his hand with little reserve at least once.
I referred earlier to his two attempts in
the narrative vein. It is interesting to
note that he adventured once into the
domain of the pure lyric, namely in his
sonnet-sequence. To put it thus is, of
course, to overlook for the moment inci-
dental lyrical work like the sonnet forms
imbedded in "Romeo and Juliet," and
the charming dramatic songs sprinkled

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through pieces like "As You Like It" and "The Tempest." Shakespeare's Sequence consists of one hundred and fifty-four sonnets. They form a kind in themselves, rhyming *ababcdededefgg*, and working up into a sententious and clinching climax in the couplet that ends them. The only series in the language worthy of being compared with them are those of Shakespeare's contemporaries, Sidney and Spenser, and those of Mrs. Browning and Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the nineteenth century. Of these last the "Sonnets from the Portuguese" are, after all, slight in number and volume, while Rossetti's—marvels of word music as they are—are undeniably marred by obscurity. Perhaps, indeed, the thing that best deserves comparison with Shakespeare's Sonnets is Tennyson's "In Memoriam." The late poet-laureate was himself impressed with the sonnet sequence-like character of his work. He explicitly characterizes his poems as "short swallow-flights of song that dip their wings in tears and skim away." Furthermore,

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in Song LXI. there occurs that striking allusion to Shakespeare,

*"I loved thee, Spirit, and love, nor can
The soul of Shakespeare love thee more."*

which shows that he had the Sonnets prominently in mind.

It is interesting—in line with what was said earlier about the naturalness of Shakespeare's development and motives—to note that in writing these Sonnets Shakespeare was giving in to the vogue of the moment. In the labyrinthine profusion of Elizabethan literature almost any clue is of value; so that it is worth while to say that in the three chief decades of this period there were three successive literary fashions. From 1580 to 1590 the pastoral was popular. Spenser's "Shepherd's Calendar," of 1579, opened this division. From 1590 to 1600 everybody of consequence wrote sonnets. It was just when the sonnet was the height of fashion, namely, from 1595 to 1598, that Shakespeare composed his. Then in the first ten years of

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the seventeenth century the song led all other kinds. Here again Shakespeare identified himself with the fancy of the hour.

At any rate, these one hundred and fifty-four sonnets have been the ground for a battle royal. Some argue that they are mere verse exercises. Sonnets 153 and 154, together with those in which the poet indulges in some rather fantastic punning, may be thought to bear out this view. Others think that while the poems are not to be set aside thus lightly, they are yet wholly imaginative, not at all autobiographic. Others, finally, contend that they are a bona fide expression of personal experience. On the whole, I should incline to this last view; although, on internal evidence, the question is simply not capable of settlement. Wordsworth subscribes to this view in his famous sonnet on "The Sonnet":

"Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have
frowned,
Mindless of its just honours; with this key
Shakespeare unlocked his heart."

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Supposing them to be bona fide, they disclose on Shakespeare's part (1) a remarkable and womanlike affection for some aristocratic friend, whom, in the first seventeen sonnets, he begs to perpetuate his beauty by marriage; (2) the baleful fascination exerted upon him by a certain woman of far from prepossessing appearance, but of remarkable magnetism, who proves unfaithful to him; and (3) the pernicious influence of a brother poet, who is co-respondent in the case. These are the main points; but, of course, taking the confession as genuine, there are many minor disclosures of interest. Such, for example, is the revelation that he writhes under the obloquy of his profession as a player. Puritan sentiment was growing, and players socially were not in the best of repute. This confession surely rids us of the Titan, of the elemental composer, and gives us the sensitive, warm-hearted man. Listen to Sonnet XXIX.:

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" When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,

I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,

And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,

Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,

Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;

For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings,

That then I scorn to change my state with kings."

Still, even if Shakespeare had not unlocked his heart in his sonnets, and despite his apparently intentional, and certainly teasing, reticence, it would be strange indeed if we could not infer a good deal about a man who placed opposite his name such a corpus of literature.

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To begin with, then, in this process of inference, it may be said that Shakespeare had his full share of the pensiveness of our Teutonic race. I like to emphasize the characteristics possessed in common by the northern or Germanic races. I am so impressed with their deep-seated resemblances to each other, and by their collective superiority to the southern or Latin peoples. Had it not been for the stormy passions, for the gust of plunder and blood that marked the Northmen of old, the American, the Englishman and the German of to-day could not be what they are. Prudential considerations and Christianity and civilization and culture have but succeeded in curbing and in directing into fairly legitimate channels the fierce, ebullient force of our barbaric ancestors. Every now and again a great Teuton appears who exhibits with special clearness the original qualities of the race. Everyone would pick Carlyle out as a man of this stamp; and Shakespeare was certainly another. He impresses us as subsuming in

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himself the collective force of the race. Almost beyond all else, he is racially German. It seems to me that melancholy or pensiveness is, with Teutons generally, a racial feature. By melancholy here I do not mean the sadness that has a specific occasion. This can have no ethnologic value. I mean rather the stealing, haunting sadness that comes at twilight or in the autumn, at sight of setting sun and falling leaf and swirling snow-drift, and that finds its source in our unequalled sense of the shortness of life and the enforced slightness of man's accomplishment. Under the shadow of this sense men of our blood have said and done their greatest and sweetest. It seems to me that Shakespeare is unrivalled in the voicing of this sentiment. Almost everywhere in his work it is present—in suggestion, in atmosphere, in locale, in trifling hint, or in overt expression. As Bernardo relieves Francisco in his watch at midnight on the battlements at Elsinore, the latter says:

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" For this relief much thanks: 'tis bitter cold,
And I am sick at heart."

A pedestrian criticism may insist that the words of that last half line have no special significance; at any rate no more than a physical significance. Certainly, Francisco did not consciously mean that they should have more, and yet I submit that, by a subtle inoculation, they have in them the whole spirit of northern melancholy. Of Shakespeare's explicit expressions of this mood, the crowning example, so far as I know, occurs in "The Tempest." Prospero, the magician, has conjured a show in the air for the delectation of Miranda and her future husband, Prince Ferdinand. On a sudden signal the show vanishes, and the old man says in common-place, ground-creeping fashion:

" These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air."

He adds reflectively:

" Into thin air,"

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and then, swept along by the suggestion, he launches into this peerless rhapsody:

“And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,

The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.”

In a passage of this sort we stand in the very penetralia of the temper of our race.

While making my contribution anent Shakespeare’s pensiveness, it may be as well to recall a verdict passed by Ruskin in his autobiography, “Præterita,” to the effect that Shakespeare’s whole outlook upon life was misanthropic. This is not, it need hardly be said, the same point as I have made. Misanthropy and pensiveness are two different things. But, at any rate, this is Ruskin’s opinion. A piece, of course, like “Timon of Athens,” is of no special value as evidence in this con-

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nection. It was frequently Shakespeare's practice to dramatize a single great and, if possible, elementary and elemental passion. "Lear" is a dramatic embodiment of paternal unwisdom; "Macbeth," of unscrupulous ambition; "Othello," of unbridled jealousy; "Hamlet," of irresolution, or incapacity for action. Similarly, "Timon of Athens" is an incarnation of misanthropy; and, as such, could be handled with just as much detachment as any other of the great motives I have just named. But, then, Ruskin declares his opinion to be a deduction from the dramatist's whole work.

Capacity for friendship is a good test of a man; and Shakespeare undoubtedly had this capacity in a marked degree. With the exception of some slight professional jealousy on the part of men less successful than himself, his relations with his contemporaries were cordial. Everyone will recall what he makes Lorenzo say to Jessica that lovely moonlit night at Belmont as, amid the scent of flowers and

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the strains of music, they await the return of Portia:

"The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet
sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted."

We may rest satisfied that Shakespeare would have said the same with added energy of the man who has no friends. That Shakespeare himself knew what friendship meant is proven by the sonnets, which are, as it were, a veritable monument to that passion. Take, almost at random, Sonnet XXX.:

"When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's
waste:
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless
night,

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And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd
woe,

And moan the expense of many a vanish'd
sight:

Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,

And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er

The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,

Which I new pay as if not paid before.

But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end."

Another noble passage in this regard, whose genuinely autobiographic, or at least personal, value cannot be doubted, occurs in "Hamlet." The Prince is about to ask Horatio to aid him in scanning the face and conduct of the King, while the play is being put on before the court:

"Hamlet—Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man
As e'er my conversation coped withal.
Horatio (deprecatingly)—O, my dear lord,—"

Whereupon Hamlet launches into this superb tribute:

"Nay, do not think I flatter;
For what advancement may I hope from thee,
That no revenue hast but thy good spirits,

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To feed and clothe thee? Why should the
poor be flattered?

No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp,
And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee
Where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou
hear?

Since my dear soul was mistress of her
choice,

And could of men distinguish, her election
Hath sealed thee for herself: for thou hast
been

As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing;
A man that fortune's buffets and rewards
Hast ta'en with equal thanks: and blest are
those

Whose blood and judgment are so well com-
mingled

That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that
man

That is not passion's slave, and I will wear
him

In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee."

Surely the note of reality and conviction
is here. We need have little doubt that
the man who penned these passages him-
self knew what it meant to be true as steel.

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An important question to be settled with respect to any great man is: Are his sympathies with the masses or with the classes? This is a question that has often been raised in the case of Tennyson, for example. On general principles one would be inclined to say that Tennyson was aristocratic; while Browning, his great contemporary and, in a sense, rival, was democratic. The decision, I think, needs no modification so far as Browning is concerned. He and Whitman are almost our greatest modern democrats. But the situation is more complex in the case of Tennyson. He was aristocratic in family and training. In particular, he was personally reserved, and avoided publicity; and this is apt to be confused with the aristocratic. But poems like "The Princess"—with its gospel of "An universal culture for the crowd"—and "Locksley Hall" show wide sympathy with the masses; and there are pictures and passages in "In Memoriam" that could have

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been written only by one in the best sense democratic. Take part of Song LXIV.

" Dost thou look back on what hath been,
As some divinely gifted man,
Whose life in low estate began
And on a simple village green;

" Who breaks his birth's invidious bar,
And grasps the skirts of happy chance,
And breasts the blows of circumstance,
And grapples with his evil star;

" Who makes by force his merit known
And lives to clutch the golden keys,
To mould a mighty state's decrees,
And shape the whisper of the throne;

" And moving up from high to higher,
Becomes on Fortune's crowning slope
The pillar of a people's hope,
The centre of a world's desire?"

This is an essentially democratic picture. Such a parallel could have been cited only by one who was a member of a self-governing community, of a community, furthermore, where the highest prize rests within the reach of the humblest citizen; and, besides, the parallel is executed with such

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unction as to show that Tennyson was in sympathy with such a social and political system. But I have discussed this question in the case of Tennyson simply to familiarize us with it as it affects Shakespeare. Shakespeare was a conservative. Nay, more, he was thorough-going, and well-nigh splenetic, in his conservatism. With him, this sympathy with the classes rather than with the masses was a matter, not of breeding, of temperament, or of association, but purely of interest. Shakespeare was one of the level-headed men of genius who make money and acquire property. Now, it is the man who has property that is interested in the maintenance of the *status quo*. The masses, on the other hand, have little to lose by disturbance or revolution. However things go, their case can scarcely grow worse. And so Shakespeare, the property-owner, the thoroughly competent man, swiftly came to eye the proletariat with mistrust. Practically everywhere his citizen-scenes are, at least by inference, contemptuous. His

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mobbs are almost invariably vile-smelling, flattering and fickle. But there are two plays in especial where he shows his contempt for the crowd. These are the Roman tragedies, "Julius Cæsar" and "Coriolanus," both of them among his noblest productions. "Julius Cæsar" is a marvel of symmetric proportion, excelling, in my judgment, any other Shakespearean play in this particular respect; while "Coriolanus," in addition to the sweetness of its domestic scenes, and the resonant mimicry of its battle pictures, leaves an impression of towering nobility, thanks mainly to the character of the protagonist. As the curtain rises in "Julius Cæsar" the two tribunes, Flavius and Marullus, are found hailing a drove of plebeians who have hitherto been the henchmen of Pompey, but who have now come out to do honor to Pompey's victor. Marullus addresses the crowd as follows:

" You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!
O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome,

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Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft
Have you climbed up to walls and battlements,

To towers and windows, yea, to chimney-tops,
Your infants in your arms, and there have sat
The live-long day with patient expectation
To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome:
And when you saw his chariot but appear,
Have you not made an universal shout,
That Tiber trembled underneath her banks
To hear the replication of your sounds
Made in her concave shores?
And do you now put on your best attire?
And do you now pull out a holiday?
And do you now strew flowers in his way
That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood?
Be gone!
Run to your houses, fall upon your knees.
Pray to the gods to intermit the plague
That needs must light on this ingratitude."

And one is forced, partly in consequence
of the hostility with which the citizens are
treated throughout the play—notably in
the exquisitely sarcastic funeral scene
where the crowd is portrayed as the absolute
puppet of the plausible demagogue,
Marc Antony—one is forced to conclude

that the spleen is Shakespeare's own. But the classical example of the dramatist's contempt for the populace is not "Julius Cæsar," but "Coriolanus." Here is the farewell of Volumnia's son as he spurns from his feet the dust of Rome:

" You common cry of curs! whose breath I
hate
As I reek o' the rotten fens, whose loves I prize
As the dead carcasses of unburied men
That do corrupt my air, I banish you;
And here remain with your uncertainty!
Let every feeble rumour shake your hearts!
Your enemies, with nodding of their plumes,
Fan you into despair! Have the power still
To banish your defenders; till at length
Your ignorance, which finds not till it feels,
Making not reservation of yourselves,
Still your own foes, deliver you as most
Abated captives to some nation
That won you without blows! Despising,
For you, the city, thus I turn my back."

No man who himself had an ounce of sympathy with the populace could execute a passage so spurting in its scorn.

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One of the most likable of traits is patriotism. If it be too much to say that no author can be widely popular without it, it is not too much to say that no author can be widely popular if he is in the least suspected in this regard. Kipling owed his vogue largely to his insular, not to say insolent, assertion of the right of the Anglo-Saxon to mastery. Two of the most widely read historians of the nineteenth century—Macaulay and Froude—owe much of their popularity to their aggressive patriotism. On the other hand, to come somewhat closely home, a man like Goldwin Smith, universally admired for the elegance of his scholarship and the perfection of his style, has suffered fairly complete ostracism because he has mildly flung himself in the face of national exaltation and advocated policies not distinctively British. Now the age of Shakespeare was, as I have implied, the most consciously patriotic in our annals. It was the age, above all, of the Armada, which owed its defeat to a passionate love of

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country that hushed dissension and triumphed over obstacles. Shakespeare was eminently patriotic in his English historical plays; so patriotic, in fact, that these plays were done so well that they have served as manuals in the hands of men who have themselves helped to make our history illustrious. So far as I remember, this passion for country on Shakespeare's part reaches its height in "Richard II." "Richard II." was written about five years after the defeat of the Armada. Bolingbroke himself, afterwards Henry IV., is a sufficiently fine embodiment of love of country. Banished, this was his farewell speech:

"Then, England's ground, farewell; sweet soil,
adieu;
My mother, and my nurse, that bears me yet!
Where'er I wander, boast of this I can,
Though banish'd, yet a true-born English-
man."

But the grand climacteric comes in the crowding, breathless speech of John of Gaunt as he lies on what proves to be his death-bed:

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" This royal throne of Kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise;
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war;
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands;
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this
England.
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Fear'd by their breed and famous by their
birth.

" This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear
land,
Dear for her reputation through the world.

" England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious
siege
Of watery Neptune," etc.

The insistent cumulation of this passage
is the offspring of a passionate devotion,
not simply on the part of John of Gaunt,
but on the part of John of Gaunt's creator.
To realize how large and substantive a

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rôle is played in this drama by patriotism, one has but to compare it with a composition in many respects similar, Marlowe's "Edward II." "Edward II." from the point of view of dramatic construction, is the most nearly perfect of Marlowe's plays. The death scene of Marlowe's king is equal, if not superior, to that of Shakespeare's "Richard II." Charles Lamb evidently thought it superior. But, so far as I can recall, there is nothing in "Edward II." to stir the pulses in the way of patriotism.

I should like now to pass to some observations on Shakespeare's method or art.

One of the outstanding features of Shakespeare's tragedies is the use he makes therein of comic characters and scenes. This constitutes what in the pestilent jargon of the schools is called Comic Relief. At any rate, it represents a great principle and a true view of the drama. The English genius has seldom done a more meritorious thing than when it sturdily rejected the Senecan type of drama, which,

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in the early part of the reign of Elizabeth, made an attempt to capture the English stage. The prominent features of this debased classical type were slavish adherence to the Unities and rigid severance of tragedy from comedy. Such a theory of tragedy is inherently and radically false. It is the business of the stage, as Hamlet declares, "to hold the mirror up to nature," and to life. Now there is no life that is unbrokenly sad; none that is uninterrupted joyous. To produce an illusion, to act as a transcript of real life, tragedy must have its admixture of comedy. Strange, under these circumstances, that the brilliant French genius allowed itself to be enslaved, to be held in shackles, by this erroneous theory for three centuries—or, if one like to reckon only from Corneille to Victor Hugo, for two centuries. And, one might as well be candid, French classical tragedy, as practised even by the greatest men of the seventeenth century, and as practised by Voltaire in the eighteenth, is in the main unspeakably tiresome

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to an Englishman. No one with his wits about him can deny the immensely superior interest of the strenuous romantic drama as instituted by Hugo. The Senecan or the French classical model pushed to its logical extreme results in sheer imbecility. Christopher Marlowe was by no means one of those who strove to naturalize Seneca on English soil. To understand the attempt one must read a piece like "Gorboduc." At the same time, Marlowe's lack of the comic vein makes a reference to him natural and of value here. So far as I can remember, "Tamburlaine the Great," with its bombast and yet its virility; "The Jew of Malta," with its riot of vulgar horrors and yet its unquestionable power; "Edward II.," with its unexpectedly great fifth Act, yet its prevalent tameness, are not lighted up by one glint of comedy. In "Doctor Faustus" comedy does enter in the form of coarse horseplay. At all events, when we say that Marlowe halts indefinitely behind Shakespeare, thanks to his lack of humor, we are tacitly admitting

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the immeasurable superiority of the Shakespearean to the Classical Drama. I believe it is safe to say that Shakespeare surpasses all others in the alternation of the two veins. For four of its five Acts, "The Merchant of Venice" has all the potentialities, nay, all the actual effects, of a tragedy. And yet, throughout those four Acts, what incomparable transcription of real life is added to the pensive menace of the tragedy by the caustic wit of Portia, by the shrewd clownishness of Launcelot, and by the vivacity of the idling Venetian youths, Salanio and Salarino! Think of the wonderful Porter's scene in "Macbeth," treading so swiftly on the heels of the murder of Duncan, and whirling us in a trice from the horrid atmosphere of unnatural crime to that of commonplace and unrelieved coarseness. Think again of the Grave-digger's scene in "Hamlet," with its convulsing pertness and callousness, following hard on the announcement of Ophelia's death. For the crippling unities of time and place, Shakespeare showed

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the most imperious contempt. A play like "Richard III." involves a period of about fourteen years. By contrast, and as an experiment in this regard, "The Tempest" is very interesting; its action—save as extended by recital—being limited to the one tiny fabulous isle and to the short space of a summer's afternoon.

Everyone has commented on the coarseness of Shakespeare; and almost everyone, equally, falls back on saying that there is at least as much of the age as of the man in it. What strikes me about his coarseness is its harmlessness. And to account for this I can only appeal to the dramatist's magnificent healthiness. The rankness of the really healthy man seems to pass innocuous. In this connection the case of Ruskin may be recalled. Sedulous as his parents were about their one child, they yet let him hear the whole of Shakespeare and of Byron. And yet I question whether a more transcendently pure-minded man than John Ruskin lived in the nineteenth century. The fact is that

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there is a radical distinction between riotously strong men, like Shakespeare and Browning, and even the best of the modern degenerates, like Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Rossetti. Each of these four men was fundamentally and subtly unhealthy. They were all hectic and indulgent, had penetrated to exhausting secrets that are better not known, and the air of the charnel-house is in much of their poetry. The sensuousness of "Christabel," the morbidity of "The Cenci," the heat of passages in "Endymion" and of lines in "The Blessed Damozel," are characteristic of the bulk of the work of these men, which is, on the whole, dangerous *virginibus puerisque*. All I can do is to contrast this with the sanity of Shakespeare. In him I cannot get away from the suggestion of the great free force of the elements. And it seems to me that somehow—in a way that is none the less effective because we cannot describe it exactly—Shakespeare does with his coarseness what the ocean and air do with the filth and the miasma

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that pour into them. There is such salubrity in the ocean that earth's rivers, with their masses of refuse, cannot defile it; there is such clarity and chemistry in the air that earth's smoke and stench cannot obscure it. So it seems to me that Shakespeare is so sane, so robust, so full to the brim of health, that nothing he gives us can be hectic or insidious; that he transmutes even what in itself appears undesirable.

In citing further characteristics of Shakespeare and his genius I shall resort to enumeration.

(1) The modernness and immediate appeal of the bulk of his work. In reading him it requires constant effort to make yourself believe that work of such new-coined freshness—upon occasion, even of such snap and up-to-dateness—was done three centuries ago. Much that the man on the street thinks current slang is to be found in Shakespeare. The best comment on the impotence, the total irrelevance, of Time, in the case of really good litera-

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ture, is his collective drama. In by far the majority of cases—barring those of downright textual tangles, due to the errors of either copyists or printers—the broad appeal of the passage is instant, and glosses are superfluous.

(2) The many-sidedness of the dramatist's knowledge. When you read the opening scene of "The Tempest," with its graphic realism, storm and shout, gust of wind, peal of thunder, creak of rigging, you are prepared almost to take oath that Shakespeare had served his time as a seaman. Along with this put the cute little snatch of conversation between Horatio and the sailors who bring to him his friend Hamlet's letter. The "sir," so often repeated in that dialogue, speaks volumes. When you read Hamlet's cynical comment on the skull of the supposed lawyer, you seem to catch much more than casual conversance with things legal. References abound in the plays to all kinds of English games and pastimes, football, tennis, quoits, bowls, falconry, archery,

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wrestling, fencing, bear-baiting. But all these things, as disclosures of knowledge, pale beside his incomparable acquaintance with human nature. I should not be surprised to find that Shakespeare had given us as many as seven or eight hundred distinct and fairly rememberable figures. In this connection it should be said that there is some point even in the woodleness of characters like the Doge in "The Merchant of Venice," and Prince Escalus in "Romeo and Juliet." An interesting, if small, section of Shakespeare's work in characterization is found in his presentations of child life. Macduff's precocious son in "Macbeth"; that malapert youngster, the Duke of York, in "Richard III.;" and Arthur, in "King John," are successful child-studies. On the excellence of his women-characters the changes have been rung again and again. Imogen in "Cymbeline," Cordelia in "Lear," Desdemona in "Othello," and Rosalind in "As You Like It," are not to be surpassed.

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(3) His capacity for a certain tremendousness of expression. I should be understood as referring at this point to detached bits of composition. Macbeth, in one of his soliloquies, speaking of the projected death of Duncan, calls it "the deep damnation of his taking-off," an expression that, as a mere expression, is nothing less than remarkable. Again, after the deed has been done, he asks:

"Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand?"

To which he answers:

"No; this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine
Making the green one red."

Compare the "multitudinous seas incarnadine" with some mouth and ear filling line of Rossetti that will quite possibly mean next to nothing. Prospero, chatting with his daughter, asks:

"What seest thou else
In the dark backward and abysm of time?"

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I think the full line here is wonderful. In the half-line he speaks quite ordinarily; but the full line is the seemingly inevitable expression of a vast mind that cannot so much as glance at the past without sweeping through a long cycle of it, and that cycle crowded for him with pregnant occurrences. And let me quote Sonnet CXVI.:

" Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height
be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and
cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and
weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved."

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What I wish for the moment to call attention to here is not the air of settled finality in the opening statements; not the air of conviction, apparently based on personal experience, of the exclamation,

"O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;"

not the air of indignant protest and repudiation in,

"Love's not Time's fool;"

not the characteristic snap of the final couplet, but the tremendous expressional power shown in the line,

"But bears it out even to the edge of doom."

(4) Facility in the achieving of great passages. I refer now to connected passages that may be taken from their setting and quoted. With Shakespeare these are always, or very nearly always, part and parcel of the text at the point where they occur. They are not superfluous ornaments. It is in the pursuance of his

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necessary and ordinary dramatic business that he achieves them. When they are quoted separately, one's natural wonder is, what could possibly account for such magnificence or such felicity? And yet, when you turn to their neighborhood in the play, you find that they are sufficiently prepared for, and adequately followed. Contrast with this practice a famous passage like that of Marlowe on Ideal Beauty in the first part of "Tamburlaine the Great":

" If all the pens that ever poets held
Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,
And every sweetness that inspired their
hearts,

Their minds, and muses on admired themes;
If all the heavenly quintessence they still
From their immortal flowers of poesy,
Wherein, as in a mirror, we perceive
The highest reaches of a human wit;
If these had made one poem's period,
And all combined in beauty's worthiness,
Yet should there hover in their restless heads
One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the
least,

Which into words no virtue can digest."

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This—on the eternal difference between conception and execution—is one of the greatest passages in English poetry; but in a sense it is marred by the circumstance that your breath is almost taken by the sudden height of the soliloquy in which it occurs. As you proceed, this soliloquy, and especially the part I have quoted, looms unlooked for; and then in a moment you are in the midst of such resounding commonplace that, looking back, you can hardly believe that the other has been at all. Now, take the celebrated *Mercy* passage in “*The Merchant of Venice*.” Portia enters. Salutations with the Doge over, she addresses the Jew:

Por. Is your name Shylock?

Shy. Shylock is my name.

Por. Of a strange nature is the suit you follow;
Yet in such rule that the Venetian law
Cannot impugn you as you do proceed.

Turning to the merchant, she goes on:

You stand within his danger, do you not?

Ant. Ay, so he says.

Por. Do you confess the bond?

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Ant. I do.

Por. Then must the Jew be merciful.

Shy. On what compulsion must I? Tell me that

Then—taking its cue most naturally from Shylock's words, “compulsion” and “must”—comes the great passage, at once diagnosis and eulogy. The special splendor of the lines, which are so familiar that it is need' ss to quote them, may be said to end with:

“And earthly power doth then show likest
God's
When mercy seasons justice.”

This is followed by a snatch of argument beginning “Therefore”; and this “Therefore” lets one down gently from summit to plain. Probably the greatest panegyric ever pronounced on Man is that given by Hamlet in the second scene of the second Act:

“What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!”

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One's natural impulse is to exclaim: What could elicit such an outburst? In point of fact the thing is made entirely natural when you remember that the Prince is describing his condition to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

"And yet (in spite of all his greatness) to me, what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not me; no, nor woman neither."

Of course, to speak of the great passages that may be detached and used without explanation as to where they come from, is by no means to overlook the throng of passages that are still great, though they cannot be thus isolated. Of these the marvellously intense invocation of Lady Macbeth may be taken just as a specimen:

"Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, topfull
Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctions visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,

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And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers.

Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,

And pall thee in the dunkest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,

To cry 'Hold! hold!'"

Such a passage is of no use for general purposes; but no one will deny that it is great.

(5) Indifferent endings. I have often wondered how it was that such a consummate master of stagecraft as Shakespeare could be content to end some of his greatest plays weakly. One is disposed to say that it would have been well if "Hamlet" had ended with the valedictory of Horatio:

"Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,

And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!"

if "Julius Cæsar" had ended with Marc Antony's eulogy pronounced over the dead body of Brutus:

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"His life was gentle, and the elements
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world 'This was a man!'"

if "Lear" had ended with the interposition of the faithful Kent:

"Vex not his ghost: O, let him pass! he hates
him
That would upon the rack of this tough world
Stretch him out longer."

And yet in each of these cases what seems as if designed for a masterly finale is followed by some tag-end, some perfunctory stage-business. My solution is that such examples show that what Shakespeare was bent upon was a real, substantial illusion of life, not a mere cheap dramatic effect. If anyone should be at a loss to know what a cheap dramatic effect is, let him read the death-scene of the Duke of Reichstadt in Rostand's "L'Aiglon." Had Shakespeare wanted to end at concert-pitch, it is with the lines cited he would have ended. But the world and life must go on after heroes are slaughtered, ideals

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are shattered, and tragedies are played out. And this great, though cruel, truth the master conveys in his implicit fashion by—even when his heart is breaking with his imagined grief—making his announcements, dividing his booty, crowning his kings, and burying his corpses.

(6) Growth. Nothing is more admirable than growth; we demand it even in Shakespeare. As a matter of fact there is no better example in our literature of wisely conserved force, of swift and yet sustained crescence. So far as his workmanship and art are concerned, his advance was from the external and vulgar to the subtle and spiritual. Let the distance, say between "Titus Andronicus" and "Hamlet," be the measure of this growth. In "Titus Andronicus" Shakespeare makes us "sup full with horrors." It is a coarse carnival of lust and blood. Now "Hamlet" is a drama of the same class, a drama of revenge. And even "Hamlet" is criticized for the wholesale blood-letting at its close. But what poetic

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pensiveness, what philosophy, what life-wisdom are interwoven with the brutal, bald fact of murder, so that this fact loses its coarseness. In "Lear" the eyes of the aged Duke of Gloucester are being plucked out. At the period marked by the composition of "Titus Andronicus," Shakespeare would have had them ripped from their sockets without a tremor of compunction. When he composes "Lear," he has grown so much more sensitive that he cannot do this sort of thing with equanimity. One eye is plucked out and —horrors!—tramped on; but before the same is done with the other the tension is to ~~an~~ extent relieved and the brutality attenuated by the interference, ineffectual indeed, of the servant of the Duke of Cornwall. My point is that the attempted rescue, together with the solicitude of all the servants for Gloucester, lessens the vulgarity; and I believe was designed by Shakespeare for that purpose. And, anyway, though the servant does not prevent the plucking of the second eye, he does

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give Cornwall what proves to be his death wound. So that Nemesis figures in the incident and spiritualizes it.

(7) Vitality. Practically the whole mass of work attributed to Shakespeare is superbly alive. Proof: the mountains of analysis, criticism and eulogy that have been reared about him. And, after all, the best test of the vitality of any literature is the reaction it produces. The literature that provokes comment, either favorable or the reverse, is alive; the literature that provokes none is just as surely dead. No one responds to this test so well as Shakespeare. No body of writing extant, assigned to a single man, has excited so much valuable discussion, or is capable of furnishing so much intellectual nourishment.

Tennyson's "In Memoriam"

Tennyson's
"In Memoriam"

IF one were asked to name the most widely and continuously read English poem of the nineteenth century one would answer, Tennyson's "In Memoriam." It has been read by thousands of people who know no other poetry. It has influenced popular expression, if not popular thinking, to a remarkable degree. The language of the pulpit, in particular, has been much affected by it. It has more or less thoroughly impregnated the expression of many preachers not otherwise widely read. Having regard to these circumstances—the gist of which is that "In Memoriam" is bound to be obtruded on our attention wherever we turn—and having regard to its very considerable volume, one may be thought justified in attempting to say a

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somewhat comprehensive word about the poem as a whole. This, while not pretending for a moment that it is either exceptionally difficult or extraordinarily profound.

One is quite justified in attempting to speak this comprehensive word—which is equivalent, indeed, to soliciting still further attention to the poem—in spite of the fact that it is often glanced at askance as an embodiment of loose or lax theological thinking. The reason why the poem is sometimes referred to in this fashion lies chiefly, I apprehend, in the deliverances of the poet on two subjects—what we commonly call Universalism, and the Evolutionary theory. Now, in regard to the former, the passage of most interest is found in the three songs, LII., LIII. and LIV. Of these, LIV. is the most important.

"Oh yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;

“IN MEMORIAM.”

“ That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete;

“ That not a worm is cloven in vain;
That not a moth with vain desire
Is shrivell'd in a fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another's gain.

“ Behold, we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.”

But it will be noticed that Tennyson announces this in no ex-cathedra fashion. He has not reached it, he does not stand by it, as a settled conclusion. The last stanza of the Song goes:

“ So runs my dream: but what am I?
An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light:
And with no language but a cry.”

In other words, Tennyson here simply voices a solution that comes fugitively to every man who is at all sensitive or in the least sympathetic. I cannot conceive that

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such tentative expression—inspired as it is, so far as it goes, by the very thought of the goodness of God—can do any real harm. As he hints at the beginning of the next Song,

"The wish that of the living whole
No life may fail beyond the grave,
Derives . . . from what we have
The likest God within the soul."

With regard to Evolution, the second of the two matters suggested, and which receives its most explicit treatment in Songs CXVIII. to CXXIV., I am by no means sure that they show Tennyson as anything like a thorough-paced Evolutionist. Indeed, I think the implication of this section of the poem is that the poet accepts the findings of science so far as they concern the evolution of man's body, but that he repudiates them in so far as they attempt similarly to account for the origin of his spirit. This is by no means an extreme position, and no one can successfully say that there is any danger in it.

"IN MEMORIAM."

Having now in a way cleared the ground, I may go on to speak of the poem for what it really is—an imperishable poetic monument of a great affection.

Tennyson's "In Memoriam" was published in 1850. 1850 was an important year for Tennyson. It was in this year that, after much waiting in consequence of low finances, he was married; in this year that, in succession to Wordsworth, he was made Poet Laureate; in this year, to repeat, his great Elegy was printed.

"In Memoriam" commemorates the friendship of Alfred Tennyson and Arthur Henry Hallam. Hallam was the son of Henry Hallam, the historian, a scholarly, judicial writer known best by his "Introduction to the Literature of Europe" and his "Constitutional History of England." The Literary Remains of the younger Hallam have been published, and would seem fairly to warrant the eulogies of his poet friend. That is, the reader of "In Memoriam" may rest fairly assured that the occasion of the poem is adequate. No

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less distinguished a man than William Ewart Gladstone has borne testimony—if I mistake not, in his “Gleanings from Past Years”—to the ability of the one whose death prompted “In Memoriam.” While I shall probably wish to refer later to Songs CIX. to CXIV., the section of the elegy where the poet sets himself most explicitly to eulogize his friend, I may insert here, as a sample of the sort of reference frequently made to him, part of Song LXXXVII. Tennyson has revisited Cambridge, has listened outside the door of the room his friend once occupied, has been shocked by the declension in the tone of the students, and now harks back to the little band of “The Apostles” who, in his day, gathered in that room.

“ Where once we held debate, a band
 Of youthful friends, on mind and art,
 And labour, and the changing mart,
 And all the framework of the land;

“ When one would aim an arrow fair,
 But send it slackly from the string;
 And one would pierce an outer ring,
 And one an inner, here and there;

"IN MEMORIAM."

"And last the master-bowman, he,
Would cleave the mark. A willing ear
We lent him. Who, but hung to hear
The rapt oration flowing free

"From point to point, with power and grace
And music in the bounds of law,
To those conclusions when we saw
The God within him light his face,

"And seem to lift the form, and glow
In azure orbits heavenly-wise;
And over those ethereal eyes
The bar of Michael Angelo."

It throws much light on the references in this Song to the debates carried on by "The Apostles" to remember that Tennyson and Hallam were at Cambridge from 1828 forward—in other words, during the period of the Catholic Emancipation and the Reform Bills.

Hallam died with great suddenness on the 15th of September, 1833, in Vienna. Thenceforward Tennyson hated Vienna. He pours on it the full vials of his wrath. In Song LXXXV. there is a brief and reserved reference to the Austrian capital.

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" My blood an even tenor kept,
Till on mine ear this message falls,
That in Vienna's fatal walls
God's finger touched him, and he slept."

But the blaze of wrath comes in XCVIII.

" You leave us: you will see the Rhine
And those fair hills I sailed below,
When I was there with him; and go
By summer belts of wheat and vine

" To where he breathed his latest breath,
That City. All her splendour seems
No livelier than the wisp that gleams
On Lethe in the eyes of Death.

" Let her great Danube rolling fair
Enwind her isles, unmark'd of me:
I have not seen, I will not see
Vienna; rather dream that there,

" A treble darkness, Evil haunts
The birth, the bridal; friend from friend
Is oftener parted, fathers bend
Above more graves, a thousand wants

" Gnarr at the heels of men, and prey
By each cold hearth, and sadness flings
Her shadow on the blaze of kings:"

"IN MEMORIAM."

All this, despite the fact that he knows better. His very friend has told him there is no pleasanter metropolis in Europe.

From Vienna the remains of the dead man were carried to Trieste, at the head of the Adriatic. There they were embarked on a sailing vessel, which carried them down the Adriatic, along the Mediterranean to Gibraltar, up the coast of Spain into the English Channel, and so on to Dover. Having in mind the ultimate resting-place of the body it may surprise the reader of the poem to find that the ship did not make for the Bristol Channel, on whose shore the village of Clevedon stands. The simple explanation is that the bearing of Hallam's body was only an incident in the vessel's voyage. I suppose the boat regularly plied between Trieste and Dover. At any rate, Dover was its actual destination. The general business of the ship is incidentally adverted to in the second stanza of Song X.

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"Thou bring'st the sailor to his wife,
And travell'd men from foreign lands;
And letters unto trembling hands;
And, thy dark freight, a vanish'd life."

From Dover the body was carried overland by coach or hearse right across the south of England to Clevedon, which lies a few miles to the north-west of Bristol. I visited Clevedon a few summers ago. The present sexton of the church tells me that his father remembered distinctly the day Hallam's body reached the village. The old man recalled vividly the hearse with its four black horses standing at the entrance to the churchyard. Hallam's mother was the daughter of Sir Abraham Eitom, the chief landowner of the neighborhood. The residence of Sir Abraham—the present head of the house is also Sir Abraham—stands just on the outskirts of the village, as one goes to Bristol. Henry Hallam, the father, by the way, was the son of a Dean of Bristol. All this, at any rate, makes natural the choice of the place of burial. All the members

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of the historian's family, with the exception, if I remember rightly, of one daughter, are buried in the ancestral church of the Eltoms. Clevedon itself is much changed from what it was in September, 1833. Then, it was a tiny village on the shore of Bristol Channel. Bristol Channel, of course, is simply the wide estuary of the Severn. This explains the allusion in the opening stanza of XIX.:

"The Danube to the Severn gave
The darken'd heart that beat no more;
They laid him by the pleasant shore,
And in the hearing of the wave."

Since that day the railroad has come, and about the railroad station there has grown up a new town—perhaps a mile from the church in which we are interested, and thrusting itself between the church and the home of the Eltoms. The actual old town has, I presume, made little progress. It, conceivably, is not so much more pretentious than it was in Hallam's time. The churchyard reaches right to the brow

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of a hill, whence the descent to the waters of the Channel is almost sheer. The remains of the Hallam family, including those of Arthur, Tennyson's friend, rest in a vault beneath the pavement of the south transept of the church. The precise slab which would have to be lifted if one wanted to get admission to the vault, now finds itself under an organ which has been somewhat recently installed. The marble tablets commemorating the various members of the Hallam family are on the west wall of the transept. Among them is the famous one dedicated to Arthur. The sixty-seventh Song of "In Memoriam" is necessarily spoken of here:

" When on my bed the moonlight falls,
I know that in thy place of rest
By that broad water of the west,
There comes a glory on the walls:

" Thy marble bright in dark appears,
As slowly steals a silver flame
Along the letters of thy name,
And o'er the number of thy years.

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"The mystic glory swims away;
From off my bed the moonlight dies;
And closing eaves of wearied eyes
I sleep till dusk is dipt in gray:

"And then I know the mist is drawn
A lucid veil from coast to coast,
And in the dark church like a ghost
Thy tablet glimmers to the dawn."

Having in mind the position of the windows of the transept, I have no doubt whatever that the moonlight plays on the tablet in precisely the way indicated by the poet. Indeed, I am convinced by the note of actuality in this particular Song that the poet himself, lingering lovingly perhaps far on into the night, had seen it so play. An old lady whom I met the evening I was at Clevedon, and whose family has long been associated with the church, assured me that she had more than once conducted Tennyson to the church. He undoubtedly visited Clevedon a number of times. Just here I venture to quote LVII., most manifestly composed on the occasion of one of his visits:

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" Peace; come away: the song of woe
Is after all an earthly song:
Peace; come away: we do him wrong
To sing so wildly: let us go.

" Come; let us go: your cheeks are pale;
But half my life I leave behind:
Methinks my friend is richly shrined;
But I shall pass; my work will fail.

" Yet in these ears, till hearing dies,
One set slow bell will seem to toll
The passing of the sweetest soul
That ever look'd with human eyes.

" I hear it now, and o'er and o'er,
Eternal greetings to the dead;
And 'Ave, Ave, Ave,' said.
'Adieu, adieu' for evermore."

But the poet was not present at the funeral. In default of external evidence I simply infer that he could not bear to be. In this connection it is interesting to note that Tennyson was, to begin with, apparently under a misconception as to just where his friend was interred. The obvious interpretation of the first stanza of Song XVIII. is that he supposed

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Hallam to have been buried outside in the churchyard.

" 'Tis well; 'tis something; we may stand
Where he in English earth is laid,
And from his ashes may be made
The violet of his native land."

This stanza is absolutely definitive. Much more so, it is perhaps worth while to remark, than certain lines in X.

"O to us,
The fools of habit, sweeter seems
"To rest beneath the clover sod,
That takes the sunshine and the rains,
Or where the kneeling hamlet drains
The chalice of the grapes of God;
"Than if with thee" (he is here addressing
the ship) "the roaring wells
Should gulf him fathom-deep in brine;
And hands so often clasp'd in mine,
Should toss with tangle and with shells."

It will be noted that the alternative in the opening lines of this passage spoils it as evidence in regard to the point of which I am now speaking. But, to repeat, the

former passage quite settles the matter. However short a time it lasted, Tennyson was under a misconception in regard to this elementary fact. Almost directly opposite the south window of the south transept stands the yew-tree to which Tennyson refers twice in "In Memoriam." Having spoken of the poet's mistake anent the place of his friend's interment, it seems to me necessary to say that the reference in the first stanza of Song II. is general, not particular. That is, to put it bluntly, the "dreamless head" and the "bones" of that stanza are not the head and bones of Hallam. That would be pushing the mistake too far.

"Old Yew, which graspest at the stones
That name the under-lying dead,
Thy fibres net the dreamless head,
Thy roots are wrapt about the bones."

There is, let it be said in passing, a special interest attaching to the two yew-tree poems. At the time Tennyson wrote Song II. he was under the impression that the yew does not bloom.

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"O not for thee the glow, the bloom,
Who changest not in any gale,
Nor branding summer suns avail
To touch thy thousand years of gloom."

And so, what could be a better symbol of what promises to be his stubborn, nay, his changeless, grief?

"And gazing on thee, sullen tree,
Sick for thy stubborn hardihood,
I seem to fail from out my blood
And grow incorporate into thee."

Later, however, he discovered that the yew-tree does bloom, in its own way; and so he inserts Song XXXIX., in which he corrects his mistake.

"Old warder of these buried bones,
And answering now my random stroke
With fruitful cloud and living smoke,
Dark Yew, that graspest at the stones

"And dippest toward the dreamless head,
To thee too comes the golden hour
When flower is feeling after flower;
But Sorrow—fixt upon the dead,

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" And darkening the dark graves of men,—
What whisper'd from her lying lips?
Thy gloom is kindled at the tips,
And passes into gloom again."

It is beside my purpose for the moment to dwell upon the fact that Song XXXIX. is indeed much more than a mere correction of an inconsequential mistake, and also that the insertion of it throws much light on a matter of which I intend to speak later—namely, the method of composition of the Elegy as a whole.

My object up to this point has been to utilize the poem itself in conducting us to the moment when at last Hallam has been buried. I find, then, glancing back, that I have omitted a most important link. I have failed to say that Tennyson devotes a large group of poems (IX.-XVII.) to the ship that brought Hallam home. I said a while ago that on Vienna Tennyson pours all the vials of his wrath. I have now to say that, conversely, on this ship he lavishes all the wealth of his affection. Those who wish to enjoy it in its

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fullness must go to the poems themselves. I must be content with quoting the last three stanzas of XVII.

" Henceforth, wherever thou may'st roam,
My blessing, like a line of light,
Is on the waters day and night,
And like a beacon guards thee home.

" So may whatever tempest mars
Mid-ocean, spare thee, sacred bark;
And balmy drops in summer dark
Slide from the bosom of the stars.

" So kind an office hath been done,
Such precious relics brought by thee;
The dust of him I shall not see
Till all my widow'd race be run."

The last line I have quoted had already occurred in the closing stanza of IX.

" My Arthur, whom I shall not see
Till all my widow'd race be run;
Dear as the mother to the son,
More than my brothers are to me."

And I cite this stanza itself for two reasons. In the first place, it enables me to make the important point that the preva-

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lent note of "In Memoriam" is a feminine, and not a masculine, note. In the second place, citing it, I am obliged to leap forward from this Song IX. to LXXIX., where he harks back to the line

"More than my brothers are to me,"

and apologizes to his brother for having said such a thing, or at any rate, explains to him why he said it:

"Let this not vex thee, noble heart!
I know thee of what force thou art
To hold the costliest love in fee.

"But thou and I are one in kind,
As moulded like in Nature's mint;
And hill and wood and field did print
The same sweet forms in either mind.

"And so my wealth resembles thine,
But he was rich where I was poor,
And he supplied my want the more
As his unlikeness fitted mine."

The harking back of LXXIX. to IX. is as good an example as I could find of the sensitiveness, the naturalness, the spon-

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taneity of "In Memoriam," and of the delightful involution of its Songs. Reverting for a moment to the ship group, let me add to my comment on the crooning, engirdling affection that the poet lavishes on the vessel, a reference to two contrasted Studies that occur in this particular sequence—one a Study in Calm (Song XI.), the other a Study in Storm (Song XV.). An interesting point about XI. is that the landscape that figures in it is manifestly the landscape of Lincolnshire.

"Calm and deep peace on this high wold,
And on these dews that drench the furze,
And all the silvery gossamers
That twinkle into green and gold:

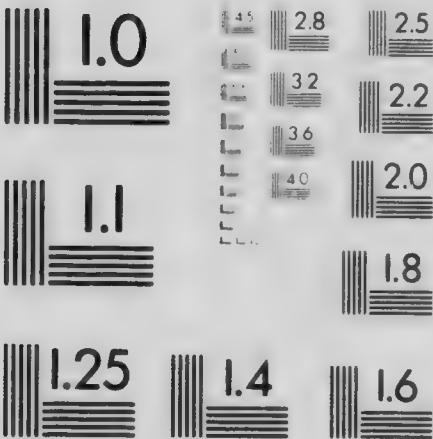
"Calm and still light on yon great plain
That sweeps with all its autumn bowers,
And crowded farms and lessening towers,
To mingle with the bounding main."

The contrasted Storm-Study in XV. is superb. Sheer necessity forces me to abstain from transcribing it in its entirety, but I simply must say that the Study culminates in its last stanza in what is prob-



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ably the most impressive bit of pictorial work in the whole range of "In Memoriam."

" And but for fear it is not so,
The wild unrest that lives in woe
Would dote and pore on yonder cloud

" That rises upward always higher,
And onward drags a labouring breast,
And topples round the dreary west,
A looming bastion fringed with fire."

Then, in XVIII., the Song immediately following the ship-group, we have the funeral itself. Here is the central stanza:

" Come then, pure hands, and bear the head
That sleeps or wears the mask of sleep,
And come, whatever loves to weep,
And hear the ritual of the dead."

This, with Hallam buried, seems the natural place at which to speak of the method of composition of "In Memoriam." It consists, in addition to the Prologue and the Epilogue, of one hundred and thirty-one Songs. These Songs, or short poems, Tennyson himself characterizes

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as "short swallow-flights of song, that dip their wings in tears and skim away." To begin with, let us get rid of the notion that the Songs of "In Memoriam" were composed in the order in which they now stand. The news comes to hand of Hallam's death. The poet-friend reels under the shock of grief. But after a time—just how long one does not know—he sets himself to versify the shifting phases of his grief. The early Songs of "In Memoriam" are eloquent now of the hysteria and now of the paralysis of new and acute sorrow. I do not think it in any sense likely that these passages were written during the stage that in point of fact they cover. This is most improbable. It is much more likely that at some fairly late date these initial experiences were recalled, were flung into verse, and were ultimately set in their proper chronological position. But there are, on the other hand, many parts of the Elegy that one sees no reason to doubt were written precisely at the times when they profess to have been

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written. Thus, to take the merest examples: we have internal evidence as to the date of composition of the Epilogue.

“ O true and tried, so well and long,
Demand not thou a marriage lay;
In that it is thy marriage day
Is music more than any song.

“ Nor have I felt so much of bliss
Since first he told me that he loved
A daughter of our house; nor proved
Since that dark day a day like this;

“ Tho' I since then have numbered o'er
Some thrice three years.”

I have already mentioned LVII., at the time of writing which the poet has evidently very recently been at the church in Clevedon. Again—still by way of example—there is no difficulty in supposing that the group of Songs C.-CIII. was actually written soon after the family had left the Somersby rectory—if not, indeed, in the very act of their leaving. CII. in this group is most winningly beautiful.

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" We leave the well-beloved place
Where first we gazed upon the sky;
The roofs, that heard our earliest cry,
Will shelter one of stranger race.

" We go, but ere we go from home,
As down the garden walks I move,
Two spirits of a diverse love
Contend for loving masterdom.

" One whispers, 'Here thy boyhood sung
Long since its matin song, and heard
The low love-language of the bird
In native hazels tassel-hung.'

" The other answers, ' Yea, but here
Thy feet have strayed in after hours
With thy lost friend among the bowers,
And this hath made them trebly dear.'

" These two have striven half the day,
And each prefers his separate claim,
Poor rivals in a losing game,
That will not yield each other way.

" I turn to go: my feet are set
To leave the pleasant fields and farms;
They mix in one another's arms
To one pure image of regret."

But, I repeat, Tennyson's plan was to fling into verse the shifting phases of his grief. He will not look back to-morrow

on what he has written to-day. "In Memoriam" is full of inconsequence, contradiction, caprice. The man who comes to it for logic, for consistency, for system, comes in vain. And this very fact is its glory. In the actual event grief is not logical, not systematic. "In Memoriam" is a poetic embodiment of grief; and since it is such its author was justified in allowing himself again and again to traverse his own conclusions. I do not know that I can impress you with the thoroughly and legitimately inconsequent character of "In Memoriam" better than by quoting Song XLVII., in which our poet deals with what may be called the Pantheistic Hypothesis. According to Pantheism the individual soul is simply a spark or emission of or from the Great Over-Soul, into which, at what we call death, it is reabsorbed. This involves the loss of individuality. Naturally such a solution would be repugnant to the mind of the mourner. And so, at the beginning of XLVII. he categorically repudiates it.

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" That each, who seems a separate whole,
Should move his rounds, and fusing all
The skirts of self again, should fall
Remerging in the general Soul,

" Is faith as vague as all unsweet:
Eternal form shall still divide
The eternal soul from all beside;
And I shall know him when we meet:

" And we shall sit at endless feast,
Enjoying each the other's good:
What vaster dream can hit the mood
Of Love on earth?"

And yet, as I understand it, right after having made this peremptory repudiation, he goes on and concedes the whole point.

" He seeks at least

" Upon the last and sharpest height,
Before the spirits fade away,
Some landing-place, to clasp and say,
' Farewell! We lose ourselves in light.' "

This is a remarkable case. All I set myself to exemplify was that as between Song and Song we often find denial. Here we find flat inconsistency within the limits of a single Song.

It must be remembered that between the date of Hallam's death and the date of the appearance of "In Memoriam," seventeen years elapsed. At last Tennyson, in pursuance of the plan or method I have indicated, had a large amount of material on hand. He had phrased over and over again his abysmal grief. He had phrased, too, with all the exquisiteness of his artistry, and with the resources of a thousand parallels, every curl and eddy and surface ripple of it. Perhaps suddenly—who knows?—there dawned on him a sense that he had moved far forward. There is now no hysteria, there is now no paralysis, there is now no embitterment. The poet feels himself once more "kindly man moving among his kind." His sympathies are catholic, his heart tender, his outlook by no means lacking in optimism. His poems of the moment—still part and parcel of this sequence; still presided over by the memory of his friend—are reflecting this temper. He has mastered grief. He has reached a solution. He resolves to

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rearrange his Songs so as to emphasize, so as to enforce, this forward movement. So readjusted, the poems will constitute a message. They will be at once a monument to his friend and a gospel of Christian comfort to his age. The rearrangement occurs; where a lacuna is discovered it is filled; and the present ordering results. When all this is done, in 1849, on the eve of the publication of the Elegy, Tennyson writes his Prologue or Foreword. In regard to the Prologue I wish to make just three points. In the first place, it is a rich residuum—it is informed and made mellow and significant by a knowledge of the whole poem. In the second place it is noticeably full of the language of conjecture; and this, I fancy, is very characteristic of the time at which it was produced.

"Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:
Thou madest man, he knows not why,
He thinks he was not made to die;
And thou hast made him: thou art just.

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“ Thou seemest human and divine,
The highest, holiest manhood, thou:
Our wills are ours, we know not how;
Our wills are ours, to make them thine.

“ We have but faith: we cannot know;
For knowledge is of things we see;
And yet we trust it comes from thee,
A beam in darkness: let it grow.

“ Forgive my grief for one removed,
Thy creature, whom I found so fair.
I trust he lives in thee, and there
I find him worthier to be loved.”

Finally, the Prologue ends with a characterization—by the poet himself, and so, necessarily, of the first value—of the poem as a whole.

“ Forgive these wild and wandering cries,
Confusions of a wasted youth;
Forgive them where they fail in truth,
And in thy wisdom make me wise.”

But the one hundred and thirty-one Songs of “In Memoriam” are by no means entirely “wild and wandering cries.” The course of them is marked by much grouping, much organization.

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Most important of all, there is the general trend of which I have spoken. Then a large proportion of the Songs are arranged in perfectly definite groups. To illustrate: There is the ship-group, to which I have already referred so often (IX.-XVII.). The Future Life forms the general theme of a very large section running from XXXI. to LXV. Within this there are many subsidiary groups, such as the Lazarus poems, to begin with, and the Universalism-group (LII.-LIV.). Songs XC. to XCV. deal with Spiritualism. C. to CIII. form a valedictory to Somersby. The set eulogy of Hallam comes in Songs CIX. to CXIV., in the last Song of which group Tennyson occupies exactly the same ground as he takes in that one of his admirable political poems that begins "Love thou thy land with love far-brought from out the storied Past." Evolution is dealt with primarily in Poems CXVIII. to CXXIV. Finally, just before the Epilogue, there now stands a group of mystic, optimistic, pantheistic

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poems (CXXIX.-CXXXI.) that form a striking point of contact with the close of Shelley's "Adonais." CXXX. reads:

"Thy voice is on the rolling air;
I hear thee where the waters run;
Thou standest in the rising sun,
And in the setting thou art fair.

"What art thou, then? I cannot guess;
But tho' I seem in star and flower
To feel thee some diffusive power,
I do not therefore love thee less:

"My love involves the love before;
My love is vaster passion now;
Tho' mix'd with God and Nature thou,
I seem to love thee more and more."

I cite these groups, not as exhausting all there are, but simply as exemplifying the way the poems congregate. It is only fair to add, however, that when Tennyson had done his best he still found a fair number of stubborn, recalcitrant Songs which would not coalesce very successfully, and which, nevertheless, he did not feel free to throw by the board. Thus, for example, if the student or the careful

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reader will glance, say, at the area LXXIX. to LXXXIX. he will probably be constrained to admit that he finds there ten or eleven Songs that stand stiff-neckedly apart. And so let them stand. They are sufficiently beautiful and sufficiently significant to justify themselves.

In this savagely compressed survey of "In Memoriam" I have been forced to decline every challenge to dilate upon details. The detailed attractions of "In Memoriam" are simply endless. To call attention to even a fraction of them in writing would be out of the question. Furthermore, in enumerating, a moment ago, some of the leading groups of Songs, I said nothing intrinsically about some most important Sections. On account of its predominant importance I feel obliged to say a word about the Section XXXI.-LXV. Tennyson's conception, speaking generally, of the Life Beyond is that it is a state of crescent activity in which the spirit holds commerce with all those other spirits whose peer and mate it has fitted

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itself to be. The Spiritualistic group (XC.-XCV.) culminates in two remarkable Songs—one (XCIV.) in which the poet lays down with sensitiveness and sanity the conditions of spirit-intercourse as between the living and the dead; and another (XCV.) in which he graphically describes an extraordinary experience of his own. Here are the conditions of vivid communion, as he conceives them. What a rebuke, by the way, they offer to the vulgarity of many of the séances of our own day!

“ How pure at heart and sound in head,
With what divine affections bold
Should be the man whose thought would
hold
An hour’s communion with the dead.

“ In vain shalt thou, or any, call
The spirits from their golden day,
Except, like them, thou too canst say,
My spirit is at peace with all.

“ They haunt the silence of the breast,
Imaginations calm and fair,
The memory like a cloudless air,
The conscience as a sea at rest:

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"But when the heart is full of din,
And doubt beside the portal waits,
They can but listen at the gates,
And hear the household jar within."

The close of "In Memoriam," that is to say, the Epilogue, is a marvellous piece of work. One of Tennyson's sisters—Emily—had been engaged to Arthur Hallam. Now Cecilia, another sister, is about to marry Edmund Law Lushington, professor of Greek in Glasgow University. In connection with this marriage Tennyson writes an Epithalamium or Wedding-Song, which he makes the close of his Elegy. This completes the cycle. The orbit has been completely traversed. The funeral knell is lost in the marriage peal. The wail has become a paean. Stand still and admire the distance that the once stricken man has covered. The wedding is described charmingly. The bridal pair are gone. The poet remains behind. And now, first with what delicacy, and then with what power, he closes. Of this union there will be a child. That child will be

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a link between the generations. Each generation improves upon its foregoer, until at last the ideal, the millennial, the culminant race will come, of which—and here is the masterly filiation—his friend had been a representative sent before his time.

“ And rise, O moon, from yonder down,
 Till over down and over dale
 All night the shining vapour sail
 And pass the silent-lighted town,

“ The white-faced halls, the glancing rills,
 And catch at every mountain-head,
 And o'er the friths that branch and spread
 Their sleeping silver thro' the hills;

“ And touch with shade the bridal doors,
 With tender gloom the roof, the wall;
 And breaking let the splendour fall
 To spangle all the happy shores

“ By which they rest, and ocean sounds,
 And, star and system rolling past,
 A soul shall draw from out the vast
 And strike his being into bounds,

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" And, moved thro' life of lower phase,
 Result in man, be born and think,
 And act and love, a closer link
 Betwixt us and the crowning race

" Of those that, eye to eye, shall look
 On knowledge; under whose command
 Is Earth and Earth's, and in their hand
 Is Nature like an open book;

" No longer half-akin to brute,
 For all we thought and loved and did,
 And hoped, and suffer'd, is but seed
 Of what in them is flower and fruit;

" Whereof the man, that with me trod
 This planet, was a noble type
 Appearing ere the times were ripe,
 That friend of mine who lives in God,

" That God, which ever lives and loves,
 One God, one law, one element,
 And one far-off divine event,
 To which the whole creation moves."



Tennyson's "Idylls of the King"

Tennyson's
"Idylls of the King"

IN any at all complete survey of Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" it seems natural, before dealing with the intrinsic characteristics of the poems, first to follow the story of their growth.

"The Lady of Shalott" was one of the poems of the 1832 volume. If we put the writing of this piece say in 1831, and then recall that as late as 1891 Tennyson inserted in the Epilogue the line "Ideal manhood closed in real man," it will be apparent that the epic was close to his heart and hand for sixty years. "In Memoriam"—if one remembers the seventeen years of its original composition, as well as the insertion in later editions of two whole Songs and the frequent textual changes made throughout—is a fair, though inadequate, parallel. And these

two, "In Memoriam" and "The Idylls," despite the varied attractions of his other verse, must be judged Tennyson's chief achievements. Both offer fine examples of the effectiveness that springs from bulk when adorned with minute and subtle literary effects. Both, it is needless to say, are made vastly more impressive by the thought of the time spent on them. They are not the upstarts of a moment. They have been minted in their maker's heart. The great Elegy enshrines the best of his thinking for the first half of his career; while on the Idylls, though they are not so packed with significance, he lavished his maturest skill.

The first of Tennyson's Arthurian poems, then, was "The Lady of Shalott." The only indications that it is Arthurian are the allusions to Camelot and the somewhat passive role of Lancelot. The literary merits of the poem lie in the fine idealization of details in the description of Lancelot, the sensitive adaptation of season and Nature to situation—other

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early instances of this are the two "Marianas" and "The Lotos-eaters"—and the success with which, by a touch at the close, the poet succeeds in arousing our interest in Lancelot,

"But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, 'She has a lovely face;
God in His mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott.'"

The question may be mooted whether "The Lady of Shalott" is a simple fairy tale or a symbolical poem. To adopt the latter contention is to find in the maiden a representative of those who, unwisely sequestering themselves from the world, are shipwrecked when, unprepared, they come into collision with the actualities of life. While it is not possible to settle the matter, it may be said that the early date of the poem's composition is no argument against the theory of a spiritual meaning, since this same 1832 volume included "The Palace of Art," which is confessedly allegorical, and "The Lotos-eaters," in

the last stanza of whose Choric Song there may well enough be an aversion to social anomalies as righteously indignant as Edwin Markham's "The Man with the Hoe."

To the student of the development of the "Idylls" it is interesting to note that even in "The Palace of Art" there is a reference to Arthur. The King in Avalon is the subject of a picture in one of the rooms of the Soul's "lordly pleasure house,"

"Or mythic Uther's deeply wounded son
In some fair space of sloping greens
Lay, dozing in the vale of Avalon,
And watched by weeping queens."

The points of importance here are the full knowledge of the career of the King shown in this little stanza, and the resemblance between the picture offered and that given in anticipation by Arthur to Bedivere in the "Morte" of 1842,

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"It lies
Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

In only three cases before coming to the date of the epic's completion shall I speak in detail of any of the "Idylls." These three are those of "Lancelot and Elaine," "The Holy Grail," and "The Passing of Arthur." My reason for singling them out is that all three are fuller treatments of early themes, and it seems natural to deal in juxtaposition with both forms.

"Lancelot and Elaine"—the name, by the way, has been changed from "Elaine," and the new title gives a more correct impression of the real equipoise of interest between hero and heroine—was written in 1858, and given to the public in 1859. Put briefly, it is the story of the havoc wrought in the life of a simple country girl by the advent of the great Lancelot. Astolat in this touching "Idyll" is a variation of Shalott, and this is simply one of the points that link the poems.

Elaine is an artless maiden who, in the matter of the man to whom she gave her love, adventured out of her sphere, and had to pay the penalty. She staked all on a single throw, and lost. Her "Song of Love and Death," made not long before she died, puts her fate in its most inevitable terms. In comparing "The Lady of Shalott" with "Lancelot and Elaine," one notes what follows. For one thing, every suspicion of symbolism is gone. "Lancelot and Elaine" is thoroughly human and substantive. Beside it "The Lady of Shalott" seems slight, insubstantial, elusive. The poet is able in the "Idyll," as he is not in the earlier poem, to effect a pleasing contrast in his pictures of court and country life. Then the episode, so far as it concerns the two chief characters, is linked with the larger scheme of the "Idylls" in a way that is, of course, totally unthought of in "The Lady of Shalott." Had it not been for the guilty passion of Lancelot for the Queen, he might have been able to return the love

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of the lily maid. A striking resemblance in the two poems is found in the conduct of Lancelet. This is equally honorable in both cases. It may be said, in passing, that among our obligations to this consummate "Idyll" is this, that it is to it we must go for the fullest light on the character and demeanor of Lancelet, while even the poem called by her name is no more important for a knowledge of Guinevere herself. Finally, it seems to me that the difference between the thread-like and evasive "Lady of Shalott" and the fully-burgeoned "Lancelot and Elaine" is significant of the poet's advance in those twenty-seven years in robustness and grasp upon life.

In the two-volume edition of Tennyson's poems that appeared in 1842 there are three numbers over which we must linger. One of these, "Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere," is denominated, and has the air of, a fragment. The time of year in this fragment, then, is the most divine season of the spring. Remembering the

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cycle of the year in the "Idylls" as a whole, this seems to me not unimportant. Add to this that there is not the faintest glint of suspicion that the relation between the two is at all illicit. They simply rejoice in each other as, without guilt, a fine man and a glorious woman may.

Another 1842 poem with which we are concerned is "Sir Galahad." Tharks in part to this poem of seven stanzas, and in part to Watts' portrait of the visionary youth, none of the knights of the Round Table is so familiarly known as Galahad. Readers of "Lancelot and Elaine" remember him as the one, along with Percivale, deputed by the King to carry from barge to palace the body of the maid of Astolat. He was an idealist, an enthusiast, but withal not unpractical, as the fourth line of the second stanza of the poem before us shows. The vision that haunted him in especial was that of the Holy Grail, fabled to be the cup from which Christ drank at the Last Supper, and in which Arimathean Joseph after-

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ward caught some drops of the blood of his dying Lord. The sight of it was vouchsafed only to those who had learnt the double lesson of purity and of self-suppression. A pendant or complement to "Sir Galahad" is found in "St. Agnes' Eve," with which, of course, we are not immediately concerned. It may be permitted, however, to say that the atmosphere of both is so intensely that of lustrous and immaculate purity that one is forced to infer the wholesomeness of the character and life of their creator.

I wish now to speak of "The Holy Grail," published in 1869, because, while the story contained in that "Idyll" is related to Ambrosius by Percivale, and while one is fascinated by every movement of Lancelot, it still seems to me that Sir Galahad is the outstanding figure of the poem. This because we naturally associate him with the vision of the Grail, and because Percivale's rapt account of his translation raises him to a transcendent height. In passing from "The Lady of

Shalott" to "Lancelot and Elaine" we get rid of symbolism; in passing from "Sir Galahad" to "The Holy Grail"—though I do not say that the relation is the same—the reverse is the case. "The Holy Grail" is full of symbolism and mysticism, and is marked at points by vast and somewhat indistinct imagery. The "Idyll" sounds a warning against indiscriminate devotion to a life of idealism, and perhaps, incidentally, of asceticism. This sort of life is desirable for some, but the duty of the plurality of men lies elsewhere. The teaching of the poem is placed on the lips of Arthur, who shows his sanity by his opposition to the Quest.

But the most important of the 1842 contributions was the "Morte D'Arthur."

This Homeric fragment was enshrined in a pleasant framework entitled "The Epic," which accounts facetiously for the celebration in verse of such a solitary incident as the death of a mediæval king. Though, to be sure, the brushing is not heroic, the characterization in "The

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Epic" is clever. The bluff, hearty squire, the pessimistic and somewhat unimpressionable parson, the sensitive wassail-loving poet, stand out with genial distinctness. The resonant voice of the poet, Everard Hall, "mouthing out his hollow oes and aes," is, be it remarked, Tennyson's own. One query is raised by "The Epic." Had Tennyson prior to 1842 contemplated a long Arthurian poem? So far as I know there is no decisive evidence on this point, though there is some that hints at a drama rather than an epic. It seems to me probable, though, that the burning of the books represents Tennyson's rejection of the scheme, either for the reason given by Hall or some other.

Now, a word as to the "Morte" itself. This gives precisely what it premises—the death of the King. To the reader of the "Idylls" the poem seems free from spiritual suggestions, save in the two lines of Bedivere:

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"But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world;"

and the dream of the narrator described in the Epilogue, in which he sees Arthur returning "like a modern gentleman." In the two lines cited, however, the doughty but quite uninspired knight may simply be alluding to the reason why the table, after which the order was named, was made round, namely, to resemble the globe. In 1869 the "Morte" appeared with the title "The Passing of Arthur," and with 169 prefixed and 211 fixed lines. These 169 lines give the soliloquy of the King overheard by Bedivere, Arthur's vision of Gawain, the actual battle—"that last weird battle in the west"—and the duel between Modred and his lord. The most significant contribution of the 29 added lines is found in those that describe the

" Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a King returning from his wars "

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No one can help noting that the old and new parts do not coalesce with the best of grace. The resonant old opening,

"So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea,"

with its reverberant vocalic effects, still stands apart repellantly. Nor am I sure that we shall ever get over the terminal feeling of the close of the old "*Morte D'Arthur*,"

"And on the mere the wailing died away."

The great difference in the two versions is that in the later the whole is spiritualized. The change in title is enough to indicate this. "*The Passing of Arthur*" is, after "*In Memoriam*," Tennyson's deliverance on the immortality of the soul.

After "*Maud*" had been published, and Farringford had been bought with its proceeds, Tennyson settled down definitely to the composition of the "*Idylls*." "*Nimue*" —changed first to "*Vivien*," and finally to "*Merlin and Vivien*"—and "*Enid*"

—ultimately broken into two, “The Marriage of Geraint” and “Geraint and Enid”—were written in 1856 and privately printed the next year. 1858 contributed “Guinevere” and “Elaine.” In 1859 these four women-poems were issued together, each with a single title. It may be premised that they have never lost their distinction. The volume in its original form gives us two bad women—one superlatively bad; the other, like her of Magdala, faced in the wrong direction—and two good.

Albert, the Consort of the Queen, was at once favorably impressed with the new poems. The letter anent them that he addressed to the author, who was now, of course, Laureate, does equal justice to his urbanity as a prince and to his judgment as a reader. The Prince died in December, 1861. It is not surprising, therefore, that when a new edition of the “Idylls” appeared, in 1862, it was prefaced with a dedication to the dead man, a dedication in regard to which one is at

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a loss whether to admire more the matchless tribute to the character of the deceased, or the touching address to Her Majesty, which ends with a mingled note of hymn and prayer:

" May all love,
His love, unseen but felt, o'ershadow Thee.
The love of all Thy sons encompass Thee,
The love of all Thy daughters cherish Thee,
The love of all Thy people comfort Thee,
Till God's love set Thee at his side again."

1869 saw four more "Idylls" added: "The Coming" and "The Passing of Arthur," "Pelleas and Ettarre," and "The Holy Grail." In view of the division of "Enid," this gives us nine. "The Last Tournament," having appeared in *The Contemporary Review* in 1871, was published the next year, along with the so different "Gareth and Lynette." It was this same year, 1872, that the epilogue, headed "To the Queen," first saw the light. In this Epilogue Canadians should be specially interested because of the ringing allusion to "that

true North," for which, by the way, Lord Dufferin, then Governor-General, expressly thanked the poet. The lines "To the Queen," are otherwise important because of the—from the point of view of the allegory—decisive line inserted in 1891,

" Ideal manhood closed in real man,"

and because they prove that Kipling is not the first or only among our recent poets who has voiced sturdily the notion of Imperial solidarity—not as a sentiment, not as a theory, but as an actuality to be relied upon either in peace or war. Finally, in the 1885 volume of Tennyson's verse—that entitled "Tiresias and Other Poems"—"Balin and Balan," notable for the delicate differentiation of its two title-characters and for the infinite pathos of its close, was published, making the tale of twelve complete. Hallan. Tennyson is authority for saying that this was designed as an introduction to "Merlin and Vivien." That purpose it certainly serves, the conduct of Vivien

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even in it being sufficiently contemptible to make us know her thoroughly. I fancy that the feeling of the poet was that it was too abrupt to bring her on the stage in a single "Idyll," so full-fledged in her villainy.

Having followed with some care the development of the "Idylls," let us now consider their actual characteristics.

So far as the narrative of the "Idylls" as a completed epic is concerned, the first point to challenge one's attention is its relative slightness. Of forthright story, advancing the action of the whole epic, there is not much, in comparison with the more than ten thousand lines to which the poems run. I may remark, *par parenthèse*, that "The Coming" and "The Passing" are the two shortest of the "Idylls"; that "Gareth and Lynette" and "Lancelot and Elaine" are, by much, the longest; and that the average length is in the neighborhood of 850 lines. With respect to narrative each "Idyll" may be regarded

in itself and in its relation to the *ensemble*. It has its own plot, and that not inconsiderable, its own crises, climax, *dénouement*, hero or heroine, or both; but, no matter how absorbing it may be in its own course, it will not be found to have very visibly furthered the action of the whole. Perhaps the movement of the "Idylls" might be said to be glacier-like—important, but not eye-catching. The narrative of the "Idylls" as a whole may be likened to a river which, after, for a short distance, following a straight course, widens out into a lake or series of lakes, studded with islands, through which one makes one's way dazzled with beauty, but without covering—speaking relatively—any great extent. Finally the stream resumes and at length pours into the sea. An important consequence of the slightness of the narrative is that our impression is confirmed that the poems purpose appealing to us with something more than surface significance.

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This, in fact, is the place to speak of the allegory, or the secondary meaning, in the "Idylls of the King."

That there is one, there can be no doubt. We should, if the worst came to the worst, infer it. It is not to be believed that a man so considerable as Tennyson, with so serious a view of life and his art, and so alert a sense of the crucial character of the age in which he lived, should for sixty years devote a large share of his attention to a subject that he had it in mind to exploit only in a spectacular way. This seems to me positively solid ground. Furthermore, we find in this suggestion of an allegory the unifying principle which otherwise we seek in vain, and which is absolutely needed to make the poems a work of art. For the bland presidency of Arthur is not enough to provide this unity, especially since there are "Idylls"—for example, "Geraint and Enid," "Merlin and Vivien," and even "Lancelot and Elaine"—in which his rôle is woefully unimportant.

But we are not shut up to our own inference. There is evidence, both within and without the "Idylls," that they enshrine an allegory. The very titles of the terminal pieces are enough to convince one, the change from the "Morte" of 1842 to the "Passing" of 1869 being specially significant. Then, the line inserted in the epilogue, and already twice referred to, simply settles the case. To make doubly sure, though, attention may be called to the fact that of all the reviews of the "Idylls" the two that elicited the Laureate's most complete approval were those by Dean Alford and W. J. Rolfe, in which the allegorical thesis was elaborately maintained. Last of all we have the best of all testimony, that of the poet and his son.

What, then, is this allegory? In general it may be said that the poems present to us the conflict of soul and the higher nature with sense and the lower. There are three things, any one of which Arthur may be taken to represent, and any one

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of which is fairly satisfactory—the soul, conscience, or the ideal man. There are momentary turns of expression throughout the "Idylls" supporting all three of these. And Arthur, at least so far as his immediate purpose is concerned, is defeated: every knight save one either traitorous or slain, and himself wounded to death. Tennyson's deliverance seems to be—widening, in a way, though, that I think would be permitted by the poet, the application of the allegory—that every effort for the betterment of the race is doomed to at least temporary defeat. Few movements succeed as at first projected; but when the wheel comes full circle it may quite probably be found that they have been worked into the social warp and woof. There is also definitely stated this truth, that nothing is so good but its time will pass.

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the
world."

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The great system of chivalry naturally occurs to one to point this moral.

Something may now be said in detail. Guinevere—at once of fascinating and of baleful memory—is Sense or the Flesh; Merlin stands for the Intellect, secular and uninspired, but full, too, of fine resource; the Lady of the Lake is Religion; the three Queens—friends to Arthur—may be Abstinence, Truth, Charity; Excalibur is the Sword of the Spirit; Camelot—its walls, like those of Thebes and Troy, rising to music, ever building and never built—figures the institutions worked out by men; “that last weird battle in the west” is the shudder of the soul when it first confronts death, this initial recoil being followed in some cases by a comparative placidity; the Passing is the transition of the spirit.

It should be said with emphasis that the “Idylls of the King” form no such allegory as “The Faerie Queene” or the “Pilgrim’s Progress.” And if even they avowed as are their pretensions in this

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respect—may be read for their story only, that is, with more or less disregard for their secondary meaning, how much more may this be done with the work before us. Above all, no petty policy should in its case be followed, of pitting one thing against another. There are whole areas where the spiritual message quite recedes, the pictorial and narrative elements exhausting all. The allegory is at most to be thought of as a tendency, a drift—a drift, however, that presses the whole into unity.

One of the great merits of the "Idylls" is the skill displayed by their author in the differentiation of character.

Tennyson's other verse, though his genius was not so predominantly dramatic as that of Browning, is proof that he was richly endowed with the dramatic instinct. Early pieces like "Oenone," "Ulysses," "The Gardener's Daughter," "St. Simeon Stylites," are remarkable for their author's identification of himself with the speaker and for the skill with which by a

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stroke or two he succeeds, quite in the manner of Browning's monologues, in suggesting a correct dramatic background or environment. In "Maud," so complete and intense was his projection of himself in his hero that he was currently credited with having staged himself. Finally, beginning with "Harold," "Becket," "Mary," and going on with "The Cup," "The Ring," "The Foresters," and so on, he showed himself to have a more practical sense of stage-craft than any other pure man of letters of the century, as is proven by the part taken in his plays by actors like Irving, Terry, Kemble, and by the long runs a number of them enjoyed on the boards of the metropolis.

It should be no surprise, therefore, to find characterization one of the strong points of the "Idylls." A good many people, though, I fancy, think that the epic is sketched on such large lines that it is not apt to be marked by subtle or minute effects. The two abilities do not often—as they do in Shakespeare; as they

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do not in Sir Walter Scott—go hand in hand. But they are united here, as also in “In Memoriam,” and we make corresponding deduction as to the genius of the poet. Take a small picture, say two feet square of canvas, with but two figures. The artist is clever if he succeeds in breathing a great deal of passion or action into those faces and forms. But, then, his stage is limited; he is able to concentrate his force on a small area. How indefinitely greater, though, Tintoret must have been since on the vast expanse of a canvas covering the entire end of the largest hall in the Ducal Palace at Venice he has been able, by poise or line or smile to differentiate every one of scores of heads and faces from every other. Now, on the large stage of the “Idylls” Tennyson has given us, at a rough computation, twenty-four perfectly distinct characters. I believe, in this matter of character-drawing,—so far as variety and distinctness, though not so far as elemental force and height, are concerned—that, despite the speeches of the

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Chiefs in Satan's Hall of Council, Tennyson's "Id." come out well when compared with "Paradise Lost."

Let us glance, then, at some of the prominent characters, and first at the King. Arthur moves on a serene height; he breathes finer ether than common men; and, it must be said, he has paid the penalty. It has been objected that he is goody-goody, that, like Milton's Adam compared with his Satan, he has been sacrificed to Lancelot, and so on. There is a sense in which this charge holds. Life does not furnish many Arthurs, perhaps none. We do not meet them on the street corners: we cannot sit and chat with them face to face. But there is surely some place in literature for the portraiture of ideals; and it seems to me that the power of Arthur to stimulate and uplift is not at all affected by this carping. I suspect that if we feel as these objectors do, it is because of our base affinities; for us, as for Guinevere, "the low sun makes the colour." For us, as for her, "he is all

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fault that hath no fault at all." In regard to the farewell address to the Queen, which has been singled out as specially pharisaic, it should be noted that in the one hundred lines or so pronounced before he pauses, Arthur speaks, and rightly enough, with the offended majesty of a king; but in the forty odd lines delivered after he resumes, there is no hiding of the wounded heart, no lack of the humanity of the husband and lover.

Lancelot is certainly a most fascinating figure. Absorbing interest attaches to his slightest movement. We snatch at him eagerly wherever we find him, in "The Lady of Shalott," in "Gareth and Lynette," in "Lancelot and Elaine," and in "The Holy Grail." Among the acute contrasts of the "Idylls" must remain the one that the poet effects between the conduct of Lancelot and of Gawain at Astolat. The one, "kindly man moving among his kind," the other with effort veiling his contempt and plotting seduction. Lancelot was a man of fine parts

and noble nature, who simply got faced about in the wrong direction. He is a notable example of the truth of Hamlet's deliverance to Horatio and Marcellus in regard to the contagion of a single fault. His one sin spoiled all.

Tristram, among the men, fairly deserves the rank of a principal character. His liaison with Isolt of Cornwall seems to me to play about the same part in the "Idylls" as the unnatural conduct of Edmund does in "Lear." Both exemplify the way sin in high places spreads through the social body. In both drama and epic the one case outside the court serves as well as a dozen. There are striking points of contact between the amour of Tristram with the wife of Mark and that of Lancelot with Guinevere. There is not much light and shade about the character of Tristram in "The Last Tournament." He is, frankly and recklessly, the apostle of free love. What Gawain conceals he confesses; what wrenches the soul of Lancelot costs him

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not a pang. I think there is a material difference in this connection between Tennyson's Tristram and the Tristram of Matthew Arnold. In Arnold's poem the dying knight's consideration for Iseult of Brittany and his touching reference to their children gives his character a coloring of domesticity that is completely absent from Tennyson's "Idyll."

Before going on to speak of the women of the "Idylls," let me say that, great as is Tennyson's success in his leading characters, he seems to me to display, if possible, greater nicety of touch in his handling of subordinates. The gruff and churlish Seneschal, Sir Kay; the sprightly and impressionable Dagonet; the brutal Earl Doorm; the passionate Limours; Enid's mother, with her controlling passions—if "passions" be not too robust a word—of fondness for dress and pride in Enid; Torre and Lavaine, the brethren of the lily maid; these form a fine list of daintily sketched minor figures.

But the four women are the glory of the "Idylls." The poems to which they give their names were published first, and remain supreme. Of Elaine I have already spoken with some care. Of Enid it is enough to say that she is a perfect embodiment of the love that endures. Her conduct in the hall of Earl Doorm is superb; and the two "Idylls" in which she engrosses the interest are, with the exception of "Lancelot and Elaine," the most quietly moving in the whole series.

About Guinevere, the first remark to be made is that she was unable to understand Arthur. The most explicit passage in this regard is to be found in "Lancelot and Elaine" (ll., 120-134). This defect may be thought of from the standpoint of the allegory, as the inability of the lower nature to understand the higher, or as the inability of men of grovelling or utilitarian ideals to sympathize with men of lofty aspirations; or it may be said of Guinevere as a woman that she was not equipped to appreciate her husband. We

are prepared for this early, although we do not think of it till afterward, by the circumstance that when Arthur and his knights first enter the capital of Leodogran, it is Lancelot, not Arthur, that draws the eye of the old King's lovely daughter. That Arthur neglected her or left her too much to herself cannot be proven. His invitation to her to go with him to the Diamond Jousts is no doubt meant to be characteristic of his practice, and not exceptional. That he had not as much time for simple domesticity as a private man goes without saying. How much opportunity for that sort of thing does one think of Saxon Alfred, say, as having? If Guinevere was not prepared for this, and prepared to master herself in the light of it, it only confirms our point, and proves that she was lacking, in the most elementary way, in the equipment that could alone have made her a fit mate for Arthur. Furthermore, the King's farewell to her seems to me to show that he had not been wanting in mere physical

tenderness. To finish this reference to Guinevere I have only to note the intensity of her power of passion. Witness her bitter jealousy in face of the reported love of Lancelot for Elaine.

Vivien, though, is the grand climacteric of the "Idylls." The woman and the "Idyll" in which she reigns are pre-eminent. Her characterization is a superb bit of work, and, above anything else in the poems, comes near taking away one's breath. Vivien is a cheat, a scandal monger, a strumpet, and consummate in all. With a fine felicity Tennyson has adapted her physique to her character. Everything about her is siren-like, serpentine, and the connotation of the adjective "lissome" is perfect. "Merlin and Vivien," in point of plot, simply gives the attempt of the woman to worm out of the magician the secret of a charm which, when gotten, she uses against himself. Her object is to rid herself of a doting lover, and Arthur, against whom she has large designs, of a valuable assistant.

Arnold, to refer again to "Tristram and Iseult," gives us, in the tale of Blanche of Brittany to her children, the thorn-bush theory of Merlin's fate, as distinct from the story of the rock or that of the oak tree. No one could read "Merlin and Vivien" without being struck by its resemblance to "Samson Agonistes." One notable difference is that, whereas in Milton's poem it is the man that is prominent—Delilah being, save for a moment, a mere shadow—in Tennyson the woman exhausts all the interest.

Tennyson deserves, I think, special credit for the skill with which he has handled tragic incidents. These, naturally, involve passages too long for excerpt, but I may at least mention, as instances in point, the death of Balin and Balan, with its infinite pathos; the finding of Ettarre and Gawain by Pelleas, with its fine reticence; and the murder of Tristram by Mark. To make my hint of "reticence" in the discovery by Pelleas good, I may be allowed to quote the lines that follow:

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" Back, as a hand that pushes thro' the leaf
To find a nest and feels a snake, he drew:
Back, as a coward slinks from what he fears
To cope with, or a traitor proven, or hound
Beaten, did Pelleas in an utter shame
Creep with his shadow thro' the court again.
Fingering at his sword-handle until he stood
There on the castle-bridge once more, and
thought,

' I will go back, and slay them where they
lie.' "

Before going on, in a concluding section of this review, to discuss the more purely literary characteristics of the "Idylls," let me speak of their high moral tone. Of course there are hateful things that have to be talked about. There is the guilty love of Lancelot and Guinevere, the unblushing liaison of Tristram and Isolt, the confirmed wantonness of Ettarre, the systematic seduction, reduced to a profession, of Gawain, the treachery of Modred, the active badness of Vivien, but—not to say anything of passages redolent of the highest morality—Tennyson everywhere handles these guilty incidents

and characters with the most gratifying detachment. Through all the lustrous guilt of queens and knights, he does not once roll it as a sweet morsel under his tongue; he remains the pure poet of “Sir Galahad” and “St. Agnes’ Eve.” A remarkable thing to be able to say along with this is that in the whole epic there is next to no direct moralizing. The first seven lines of “Geraint and Enid,” “O purblind race of miserable men,” stand out in almost magnificent isolation; because a passage like Arthur’s well-known descent on prayer is rather too closely related with the situation to be branded as didactic. We have in this absence of the reflective a striking contrast with our other great allegorical epic, “The Faerie Queene.”

Turning, then, to more distinctly literary characteristics, let me, for the sake of directness, enter, in the form of enumeration, the points I wish to note.

(1) The Verse. The blank verse of the “Idylls” cannot be done justice to with-

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out copious extracts, and these are not admissible here. A few scattered and most random lines, though, occur to me.

"Uttered a little, tender, dolorous cry."

"At once she slipt like water to the floor."

"Blazed the last diamond of the nameless King."

"To where beyond these voices there is peace."

"So strode he back slow to the wounded King."

"So like a shattered column lay the King."

As I say, these are the veriest accidents of memory, and I realize after writing them that the six are taken from as few as three "Idylls." It may appear to some that their effectiveness is due rather to the situation or the incident than to the management of the line; but I believe that a fair share of it is due to actual technique. In the first, the slurring of at least one syllable and the prevalence of light vowels conduce to an impression of femininity that suits the context. In the second, the

pyrrhic foot in the fourth place re-enforces the simile, which is itself a perfect symbol of strengthlessness. The emphatic syllable that opens the third suggests a lurid glow that in turn conjures up the tragic story of Arthur's first finding of the jewels. In the closing line of "Guinevere," which stands fourth here, the uninterrupted rhythm, while it seems entirely artless, is really the height of art, and profoundly imitative. The fifth is a classic as a specimen of impeded movement. One emphatic syllable opens the line; the next foot is a trochee; the third is a spondee; the fourth is trisyllabic. Add to this variety the difficulty of pronouncing the initial combinations of "strode" and "slow." The last line, I confess, owes much to the stateliness of its simile.

In this matter of blank verse, comparison with Milton is inevitable. I believe that by skilful substitution, by resonant vocalic effects, and by shifting of pauses, Tennyson outgoes Milton in flexibility and variety; indeed, that if the compari-

son were put in its closest terms one might say that the verse of the "Idylls" is to the verse of "Paradise Lost" as music is to majesty.

(2) Absence of the repellent. It is impossible to find a single grotesque or repulsive image in the whole range of these poems.

(3) Elaboration of the "Idylls." It may be well at once to call attention to Edmund Law Lushington's suggestion that the poem should be called "Epylls." This suggestion points to a fact, namely, the quasi-independence of each. Each poem has its own interests, its own plot, its own hero or heroine, or both, as the case may be; and Arthur is present by no means everywhere. Although slightly inconsistent with its actual method of growth, still, taking it for granted that Tennyson was blessed with tolerable foresight and that he had the whole series with some definiteness in mind from the outset, it may be said that the division of this epic into idylls is much more effective

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than the usual division into books or cantos. And that for two reasons: the "Idylls" may be read separately, and, further, each courts elaboration on its own account. Indeed, I believe we find in the brevity of the Songs of "In Memoriam," and the partial independence of the "Idylls," one reason why both works appealed so strongly to their eminently artistic composer. As the song or group of songs in the one case, and the idyll in the other, may be read separately, so they might be wrought separately. With the barely possible exception of "Gareth and Lynette," which does not seem to me to be of first-rate interest, there are no unvitalized areas in "The Idylls of the King."

(4) The adaptation of season to the progress of the allegory or the spiritual condition of the characters. Arthur is born on New Year's Eve; he is married in May; the exultation of spring pervades "Gareth and Lynette;" in "Merlin and Vivien" the thunder-storm bespeaks the

height of summer; the Tournament of the Dead Innocence is fought in rain, and Tristram rides to Lyonnese through yellowing autumn woods; the last great fight is fought in mid-winter; and the King passes on the eve of the New Year. It is needless to say how profoundly corroborative, how sensitively artistic, all this is.

(5) Picturesque passages. "The Idylls of the King" are strewn with passages—the merest instances are the description of the dress that Enid's mother wanted her to wear, and the account of the flinging away of Excalibur—that are impertinent so far as need is concerned, but that are so picturesque that we could not dispense with them. The world of poetry would be far less attractive than it is were poets in the habit of despatching their business in a matter-of-fact way. Indeed, one test of talent is the skill and the frequence with which the poet succeeds in correlating with his immediate theme beauties either of scene or incident. As I say, the "Idylls" respond fully to

this test. The last of them, "The Passing of Arthur," is virtually crowded with beauty.

(6) Imitative Harmony. Tennyson is a master of assonance, of alliteration, and of tone-color in every form. I believe it would be hard, if not impossible, to find in "In Memoriam" a single faulty rhythm unless, as in the last stanza and last line of Song VII., he is aiming directly at an imitative effect. It is enough, then, to say that the "Idylls" are quite up to his usual mark in this respect. Take one passage. Bedivere is bearing Arthur to the mere.

"Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he
based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon."

In this excerpt the vocabulary is markedly northern and Teutonic; and this our judg-

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ment approves. Then, anyone can see that the frequency of important mono-syllables and the harshness of the consonants impede the movement. Finally, the most effective contrast is brought out between the difficulty of the descent and the broad placidity of the moon-smit lake.

(7) Similes. Going on to quote from where I last stopped we find,

“ Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them.”

One of the glories of Tennyson’s style is the rare perfection of his similes. With that just adduced compare the passage descriptive of the way the followers of Limours fled before Geraint.

“ But at the flash and motion of the man
They vanish’d panic-stricken, like a shoal
Of darting fish, that on a summer morn
Adown the crystal dykes at Camelot
Come slipping o’er their shadows on the sand,
But if a man who stands upon the brink
But lift a shining hand against the sun,

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There is not left the twinkle of a fin
Betwixt the cressy islets white in flower;
So, scared but at the motion of the man,
Fled all the boon companions of the Earl."

Compare these passages, and say whether one is not justified in declaring that Tennyson's similes, whether short or long, simple or elaborate, are alike perfect. That last, by the way, is a thorough-going Homeric, that is to say, epic, simile, in the sense that one becomes quite engrossed in the treatment of the associated object.

I have a notion that such perfection is not to be accounted for by any rule of thumb. No hand-book on Poetics can reveal this secret. For the achievement of such beauties three things, at any rate, are essential: the literary faculty, a wholesome life, an all but perfect environment. I believe that a man like Ruskin carries style in prose, that a man like Tennyson carries style in verse, to a point where mere mechanical explanations are at once inadequate and out of place.